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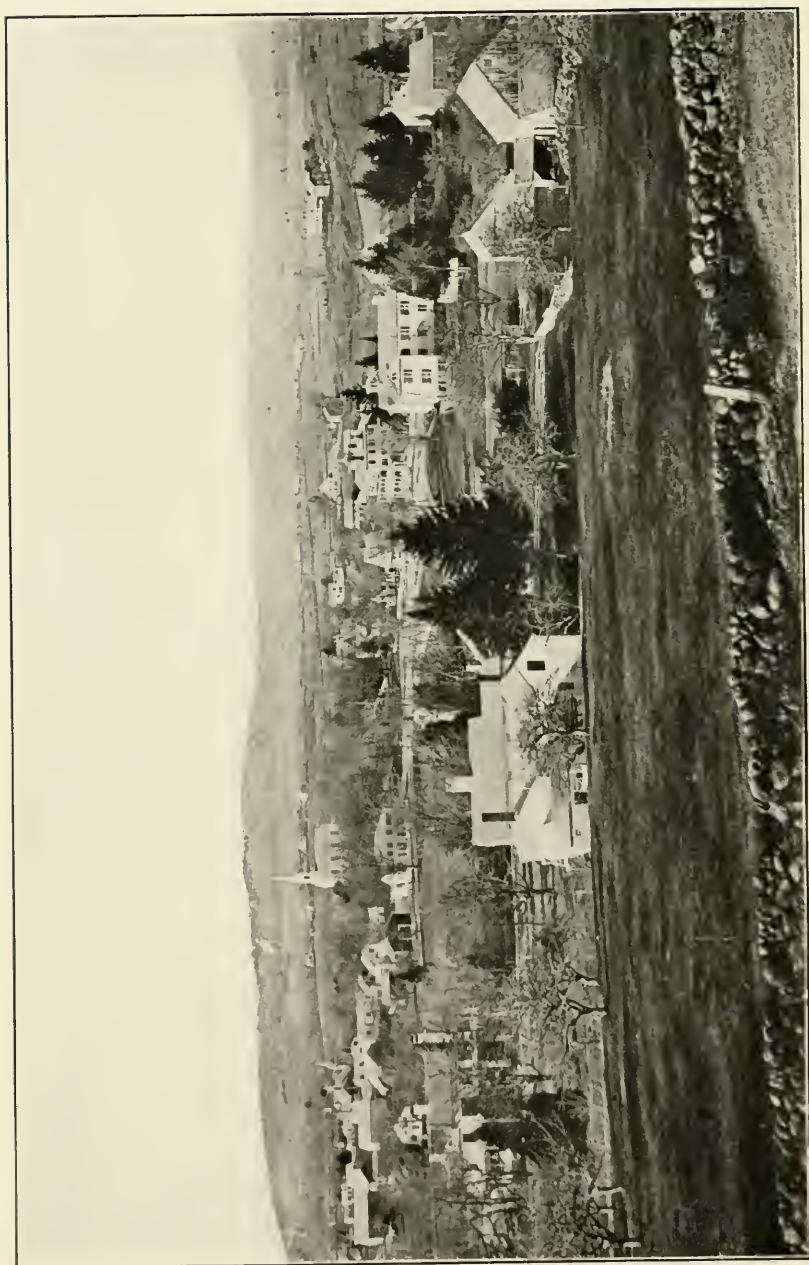






Stage Days  
in  
Brimfield





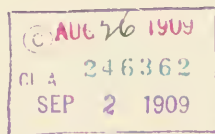
STAGE DAYS  
IN  
BRIMFIELD

A CENTURY OF MAIL  
AND COACH



*Mary Anna Tarbell*

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*by*  
*Mary Anna Tarbell*







THE discontinuance in September, 1907, of the stage line which for nearly 60 years had transported the United States mails and afforded conveyance for passengers to and from Brimfield, east and west, marked the close of an age which the survival of this line had prolonged beyond its general limits far into the modern era. The age of the stage coach, thus extended over more than a century of time, consisting of several periods, each possessing special characteristics and reasons for interest; while the line recently closed linked the old time with the present by continuing at its beginning features of an earlier period, and reflecting toward its close the radically changed conditions of today.

Naturally the line which continued this long age up to the arrival of the electric railway in Brimfield, was not sought by travelers after the opening of the modern means of transit early in July, but the stage, suddenly deserted by people, continued to wind its way over the hills, looking like a relic of long ago with the cars flying past it, in faithful performance to the end of the mission intrusted to a grander predecessor in the days of stage-coach glory.

With the passing of this mail route there is closed also an age of manners and customs relating to travel and transportation. For the Southbridge and Palmer stage line, shortened to the Palmer and Fiskdale line in 1896, on the extension of the electric railway to Fiskdale, has served not only for carrying the mails and for the safe passage of countless travelers during its existence of over half a century, but also for the transportation of commodities in such variety as would form a study for the historian.

The situation in Brimfield has presented an instance of the survival of a past age in respect to travel and transportation in one part of a section where neighboring towns long have been used to modern facilities; and it also has illustrated the continuance of the past in one phase of the life of a town which in nowise has lagged behind in social usages, educational and literary interests and industrious thrift. So while the new order is being welcomed the old ought not to pass unnoted and unrecorded, since it is important in its individual history and significant in its relation to the history of stage-coach days in general, to which there will always cling a fine flavor of romance.

It was in 1850, when Gen. Fitz-Henry Warren, a native of Brimfield, was assistant postmaster-general, that the mail route from Palmer to Southbridge was established, giving the people of Brimfield the advantage of a daily mail from New York before Warren or West Brookfield had such facilities. Previous to that time other and longer distance stage lines transported the Brimfield mails. In 1848 a daily stage from Warren to Stafford carried mails to Brimfield, but this was not a leading route in the history of such enterprises and did not support a coach and four horses. Earlier than this two grand coach routes and mail lines crossed each other in Brimfield; one between Springfield and Providence and the other between Hartford and Worcester. An earlier stage line between Hartford and Worcester ran through Brimfield, but it is not known to have been a mail route.

The great post-route from Boston to Albany lay north of Brimfield, and mail was first carried to the town by messengers from that route. In 1797 the mail stage left Boston three times a week, reaching Worcester at 3 a. m., Brookfield the second day at 10 a. m., and Springfield at 2 p. m. It is not unlikely, however, that there was connection at different times between this great post-route and Stafford, as the mineral waters there early attracted travelers from Boston.

## **The Springfield and Providence Line**

While the "Citizens' line of stage-coaches" between Hartford and Worcester had a brilliant career from 1834 to 1839, as many as 11 coaches having been counted daily, at one time in its existence, the Springfield and Providence line, opened in 1823, was maintained for a much longer



THE WEST BRICK SCHOOL-HOUSE

period and was of more importance in stage-coach history. Calvin Hitchcock, the veteran merchant of Ware, now in his 93d year, distinctly remembers seeing the fine coaches on both lines, drawn by four and sometimes by six horses, pass over the roads. The route of the Springfield and Providence line lay through the section where his early boyhood was passed. From Springfield the course of the stages was first to North Wilbraham, then to Monson and from there by a circuitous way to Brimfield. Between Monson and Brimfield the route went first over the hill now called East hill, past "Elder" Lyon's house on the summit of that hill to Abner Nichols's mill situated in the valley where the residence of Miss Boorman now stands. Thence it was northeast across a rugged incline to the old wooden school-house standing about 400 feet southeast of the present "West brick" school-house.

From the school-house it went up the "Long hill," as the "old road" was called which was discontinued about 1860, but whose course is now and then discerned in the woods. Mr. Hitchcock remembers watching the coaches go past the school-house when he was a boy in that school, and past the house where he then lived, known more recently as the David Parker place. On either side of the school-house the stage-route lay through a wild region of hills and ravines, forming a broken mountain-side difficult of passage, but which in recent time the achievements of state highway and electric road building have subdued by marvelous fills and cuts, though fortunately without destroying the picturesqueness of the region. Its romantic interest is increased by the numerous foot-paths and cart-paths crossing the wooded hillsides and the disused, grass-grown roads by which the people of former generations traversed the section, trying to make improved ways of passage.

Such suggestive and picturesque names as the "Gulf road" and the "Dungeon," by which the older people still designate localities, harmonize with the character of the region. Such difficulties of ascent to the level of Brimfield village has this mountainside presented to modern methods of transit, that the old way of travel has been kept up until now, and the history of a town vitally affected in consequence.

After crossing the heart of this section and finishing the climb up the mountain, the Springfield stage found a level path through a pass in the high barriers that surround the Brimfield plateau, until it reached the Charles place; then it turned north of the present road, to go over the hill to the corner by the "Squire" Wales place. This was in accordance with the old-time policy of stage-coach routes to mount the hills instead of going around them, because it was held that the course over the hill was the shorter. Afterward the philosophy of the Brimfield farmer who contended for the building of roads around the bases of hills came to prevail. His oft-repeated remark was, "I'll say agin as I've said afore, that the bail of a kettle is just as long standing up as it is laying down." Whenever it is noted that three roads followed the same general course between two points, it may be inferred that the one going over the highest part of a hill was built expressly for a stage-route which was intended to be an air line and which sometimes left a house that the first old road had wound up to in an accommodating manner, literally "out in the lots."

Of course, the earliest stages followed the original highways laid out at the settlement of towns, which went over the hills not only because the way seemed more direct, but for the sake of avoiding swamps and the bridging of streams. The road built afterward around the hill and followed by the stage coaches of a later period is still called oftentimes the "new road," although it may have been built more than 50 years ago.

## **The Hartford and Worcester Line**

The Hartford and Worcester "Citizens' line" was an enterprise in which various towns took great interest and which was made a post-route by Postmaster-General Hill. The line was established by a corporation composed of proprietors in the various towns from Stafford to Brookfield. An interesting document consisting of the articles of agreement of this corporation has been found recently and deposited in the Brimfield public library. The preamble reads:

"The Undersigned, Owners and Proprietors of the Citizens' Line of Stage-Coaches that run from Hartford to Worcester through Ellington, do for the well ordering and managing the affairs of the Concern, ordain and establish the following articles of agreement."

The articles were signed at Stafford, Ct., February 28, 1834, and the signatures are John Holton, Pardon Allen, Arnold Slocum, Elisha Pember, Benjamin Salisbury, Jr., Thomas Bolton, Daniel N. Green, Samuel Smith, Gardner Gould, John W. Utley, Eleazer B. Draper, Eli Horton, E. B. Pratt, B. & C. Adams (by A. Work, Attorney), Thomas Pinks & Co., Erasmus Stebbins, Ezekiel Walker, Aaron Kimball, Jonas Estabrook, Farnsworth & Harris, J. M. Warren. Brimfield and Stafford have the largest representation among the signers. There are 11 articles, covering nine pages of a record book relating to organization, management, expenses and profits. The interest in the enterprise was divided into shares of \$100 each. The line was divided into five sections, and the proprietors of each section were to choose a director for that section and hold their annual meeting on the second Monday in September. The annual meeting of all the proprietors was held on the second Monday in October. The directors of all the sections constituted the board of directors. Article 7 specifies the duties of the clerk, and incidentally throws much light on the business details of the line. It reads as follows:

"It shall be the duty of the clerk to furnish the President and each Director with a true and attested Copy of the articles of agreement annually, within one month after each annual meeting of said Proprietors. The clerk shall at all times be subject to the order of the board of directors in any business relating to the management of that part of the concern in which all the Proprietors have a common Interest, such as hiring and paying Agents, Bridge Toll, Drivers through the whole line, purchasing and repairing Coaches, Sleighs, Bells, Buffalo Robes, Advertising, etc. And to see that all money as Fare is properly receipted and to see that all money that shall be taken at the Ends of said line is deposited safely in the Bank to the Credit of the Citizens' Line Payable to said Clerk, and who shall pay the same over to the several Directors on demand according to the Mileage of each Section, after paying the Common Stock Debts and all other common stock expenses, and it shall further be the duty of the clerk to see that the Stages are run regularly, departing from each end



of said Line at such time as the board of Directors shall order and to regulate and see that a time Bill be printed on the back of each way Bill, and the hours of arrival and departure at each section, or Changing place be entered. It shall be the duty of the clerk to report to the Board of Directors at their meetings, the amount of all Credits to said Line and debts against said line for money paid out on account of expenses which shall have accrued on the Common Stock concern, and shall declare the dividend of any to each of said Sections according to their respective Mileage."

The clerk's compensation for his services and all the responsibility entailed was specified as "one dollar per day and his necessary expenses for the time he actually is employed in the company business."

According to the final article of agreement, no proprietor could sell his share or shares to a person not already an owner without the consent of a majority of the board of directors. When the variable conditions upon which the operation of a stage line depended and the difficulties of corporate management of such a concern are considered, such careful and detailed specifications as the above are not surprising. The wonder is that time schedules could be so closely followed and that passages were made with such safety, or that a stage-line concern could be managed with any degree of satisfaction. The duties, and especially the financial relations, of the directors are prescribed in such a long and minutely specified article that surely each director, while assured of his just dues, was confined within a straight and narrow way, which offered no means of escape into devious paths of personal privilege or private gain. In those days it is evident that a company took no chances with itself. It was a scrupulous age.

The distance from Brimfield to Hartford was called 40 miles. The route was divided into four stages or sections, about 10 miles to a stage, or "lick," with a change of horses at the end of each stage. The coaches on the Hartford and Worcester Citizens' line entered Brimfield by the present Wales road on their way from Stafford, which was one of the places where the horses were changed, and passed out of Brimfield to Brookfield by Sherman pond, or Great pond, as it was then called, and through South Warren, which was then the thriving business center of Warren. Mrs. Emily Woods of Worcester recalls seeing so many of these

coaches pass the old red school-house in the Northeast district in Brimfield, when she was a child at school there, that "it seemed almost like living in a city."

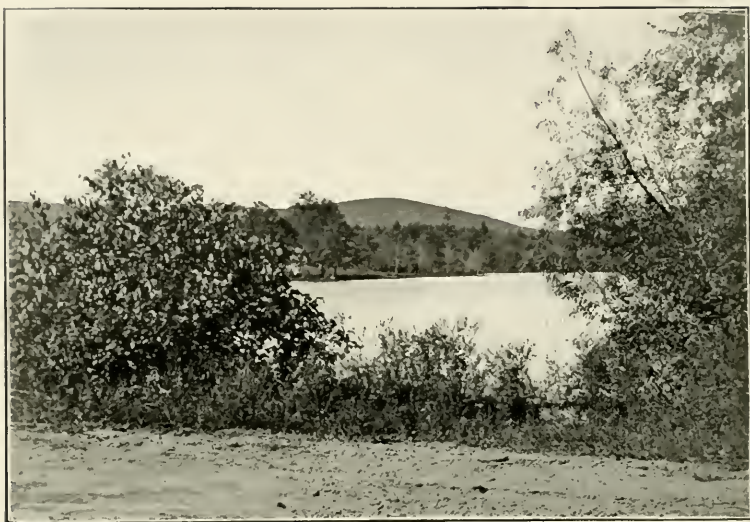
This stage line had a rival and competitor in the "Eclipse" line, which ran through Sturbridge, so that fares were reduced as low as \$1.00 or \$1.50 between Hartford and Worcester. Mention of toll charges is made in the articles of agreement of the Citizens' line, but there were never any turnpike roads with their toll demands in Brimfield. The nearest turnpike was in Holland, over which the Eclipse line may have run.

A stage-coach line earlier than the Citizens' line went from Hartford to Worcester through Brimfield, and its route, in accordance with the custom of hill climbing, was over Haynes hill from Wales to Brimfield. There is no doubt that a number of stage routes lay through Brimfield in early times of which all knowledge has vanished, and only a vague hint remains. In some places they have become sections of present highways; elsewhere they may be discovered as discarded and overgrown roads or as useful cart paths.

## Interest of Long Abandoned Roads

An old road, grass-grown and forgotten, now faintly traced and now disappearing altogether, is invested with mingled charm and awe. Mystery and scenes of the imagination together hover over it. The whole countryside has become a palimpsest by the tracings of the roads and paths of succeeding generations. Old stage roads possess peculiar impressiveness because they connected far distant places and tell of the braving of long journeys in quest of new scenes and adventures.

There stands out from the dimness of supposition concerning the earliest stage routes through Brimfield the well-established tradition of a remarkable location over the ridge of the mountain west of the "Hollow." In the ledge on the crest of the mountain, 1,000 feet above sea-level, are grooves in the solid rock which people now past middle life had pointed out to them in childhood by their parents as having been made many years before by the wheels of stage coaches going from Boston to Hartford. Measurements have found these grooves to correspond in distance apart with the width of the road which may be traced beyond.



MILL POND AND MOUNTAIN WEST OF THE "HOLLOW"

The wearing into the rock bed may be accounted for by the custom of chaining the wheels together in the absence of brakes; hence in time the effects of a chiseling process would be produced by the sliding wheels. Toward the west the road went through the Ballou woods and by the old Ballou house, once the home of a branch of the family from which came the pioneers of the doctrine of Universalism. Forests have been cut down and have grown anew; houses have perished and their cellar holes have filled up; men have died and their names have been forgotten; beliefs have been modified and have taken new forms; but the wheel ruts cut in the solid granite of the mountain have been preserved through the heat of summer and the frosts of winter in lasting witness to the intrepid and persistent spirit which literally cut the way for the prosperity of present generations.

### The Bugle-Heralded Coaches

The passing by on the country roads of the loaded coaches drawn by four and occasionally by six horses was a great source of entertainment to the people. The driver would wind a bugle—an art which was practiced for musical effect—as the coach approached the village, to announce that it was nearing the hotel, so that a relay of horses should be made

ready and the onward passage delayed as little as possible. The bugle was played with especial skill by certain drivers, and its notes were particularly effective on a still morning,—at first faintly heard in the distance, and growing louder and clearer as the stage rolled



HOME OF WILLIAM JANES

grandly in. Both the Springfield and Providence and the Hartford and Worcester lines changed horses at the Brimfield hotel, and a large number were kept there for relays. If a coach arrived about noon the driver and passengers would dine at the hotel while the horses were fed. Drivers took a proper pride in the appearance of their horses as well as in feats of rein-handling and the turning of fine curves.

The late William Janes, who passed his entire life in the quaint house next to the hotel, distinctly recalls the gay and exciting scenes attending the arrival and departure of the stage coaches. One driver between Springfield and Providence, Frank Call, who prided himself on his skill as a reinsman, would come in with every horse on the jump and cut a marvelous circle in the hotel square. He also played the bugle well. Dana Scripture was a distinguished driver between Hartford and Worcester and added to his feats in driving unusual thoroughness in the care of his horses. He would demand the spending of an hour daily in grooming each horse so that its coat would not soil a white silk handkerchief. "They shone so you could see your face in them," is said of Dana Scripture's horses. Stage horses knew well their driver and his tricks and specialties, and they learned the roads well. This is illustrated by an incident on the Hartford and Worcester line. On the road near Stafford there lay a hollow between two hills, down the first of which a certain driver was accustomed to run his horses to get up speed for the approaching ascent. One day a substitute driver was on, and not being initiated, was stricken with terror by this performance over which he had no control, supposing coach and contents were on their way to destruction. "But the horses knew," said the relator of this story.

## Grandeur of the Old Stage Drivers

Stage drivers were men of ability and held an importance all their own. They had to be skilful not only in the handling of horses but of people. They had keen practical sense for every emergency and constantly increasing intelligence concerning matters of general interest. To forbearance and good nature must be added sympathy for, and interest in, people. Not only were they directly responsible for their load of human beings, but they accepted a responsibility for the people through whose borders they passed, carrying to them news and messages and parcels with ever a word of good cheer. As his reward the able stage driver was like a prince driving his coach and four through his own domains, and no mean privilege must it have been for the traveler to mount the steps to the coach's door and share in the glory of the grand equipage. Proud indeed was the small boy who saw a big copper cent spin down to him from the fingers of the lordly driver, and off in a trice came his cap as he stared awe-struck at the loaded coach drawn by four white horses sweeping grandly on.

Among the drivers between Hartford and Worcester, Dana Scripture, Dwight Johnson, Frank Johnson and Valentine Bond are recalled. Stage drivers of unusual ability became conductors on the railroads when they were opened. Arba Hyde of Stafford, now remembered as the veteran conductor on the Boston and Albany railroad, was once a stage driver and for a time officiated on the line from Stafford to Warren through Brimfield.

We think of stage-coaching in the days of its glory as invested with romantic interest, without considering why this custom of transit developed to such a height of favor and patronage for a certain period, so that from 6 to 10 coaches loaded inside and out passed daily through Brimfield. It did not need a coach and four horses to carry the handfuls of mail, and the busy people did not spend much of their time in journeying to visit distant friends. When the matter is looked into we find that the great development of stage-coach travel in the second quarter of the last century was caused by the evolution of machinery and the establishment of manufactories, and also, near the middle of the century, by the building of railroads which called for connecting routes across country. Most of the passengers who filled the coaches and those whose tall beaver



hats made the load on top so conspicuous and imposing, were business men rolling as rapidly as this method of travel would permit from one manufacturing town to another and making their way to Boston and New York, the leading commercial centers.

The fact that water-power had been so extensively developed in the section between Brimfield and Providence gave especial importance to the Springfield and Providence stage line as a means of travel. This line also appears to have been the principal reliance for mail transportation for at least 20 years. The exact time of the discontinuance of the Springfield and Providence line has not been ascertained, but it was probably between 1844 and 1848. The line was in operation after the completion of the Western railroad as far as Springfield, as a register used at the Springfield hotel—afterward the Exchange hotel—contains an entry of stage passengers for Providence on the last page of the book under date of 1840. As the Worcester and Providence railroad was not incorporated until 1844, it is probable that the stage line in question carried mail from Springfield to Providence for some years after that. If the mail-carrying contract was made in 1823, the year the line was opened, and was renewed every fourth year the service might have been maintained until 1847. It is known that a mail team was running in 1848 between Stafford and Warren through Brimfield, and this route may have been maintained during a short interim between the discontinuance of the Springfield and Providence line and the opening in 1850 of its successor, the Palmer and Southbridge line, which followed the same course through Brimfield and Southbridge.

## Postmasters and Mail Service

The Springfield and Providence may have been the earliest long-distance post-route of which Brimfield had the benefit, although the town had a post-office in 1806, the year after the earliest post-office between Worcester and Springfield was established at Brookfield. It was from the Brookfield office, situated on the grand post-route from Boston to Albany, that the mail was at first carried once a week to Brimfield, and there is no knowledge concerning the transportation of mail by the early Hartford and Worcester stage-coach line. When the weekly newspapers came to be eagerly anticipated, special messengers were hired to carry them to Brimfield from Warren where the stages had left them. The people of Holland and Wales obtained their mail from the Brimfield office.

The first postmaster in Brimfield was "Squire" Stephen Pynchon. The post-office was kept at Squire Pynchon's house, and for a good many years a box two feet square was large enough to hold all the mail. Marquis Converse was the second postmaster, receiving his appointment February 19, 1823,—the year the Springfield and Providence line was opened—and the office was kept in the hall of his house, now the home of Charles S. Tarbell. Very little space at the foot of the stairs was needed for this purpose, as the bulk of mail was still small. The next postmaster is said to have been Porter Wales, who kept the office at his place of business, the old "Corner store." At this time both stage lines, the Springfield and Providence and the Hartford and Worcester, were in operation, the first-named entering town by the Palmer road and the other by the Wales road, and thus intersecting at the corner store. Otis Lane succeeded Mr. Wales in business and as postmaster, receiving his appointment in 1842. Dr. Asa Lincoln followed Otis Lane as postmaster, serving from 1845 to 1850, and he is said to have kept the office at Ebenezer Williams's store, which occupied an extension of the house now belonging to Mrs. John W. Morgan. Henry F. Brown, the next postmaster, was landlord of the Brimfield hotel from 1850 to 1852 and kept the post-office at the hotel where the Palmer and Southbridge stage stopped with the mail on its first trip. Mr. Brown's successor was George C. Homer, who continued to keep the post-office in the hotel. Nathan F. Robinson, appointed postmaster in 1853, kept the office in the dwelling now occupied by Dr. Sawin. In May, 1861, the stage as mail carrier again made the hotel its stopping place, as Silas C. Herring, who had made over the old hotel into a beautiful structure, was appointed postmaster that year and kept the office in a room especially designed for it in the remodeled building. In 1867 the post-office was moved into a commodious room provided for it by an extension of the old corner store, then owned by James T. Brown. Henry F. Brown received his second appointment as postmaster that year, and served till 1881, which made Mr. Brown's entire service of 16 years longer than that of any other postmaster. John F. Converse, who had bought the store, was appointed postmaster in 1881, and Horatio L. Converse, appointed in 1888, kept the office in the same place until July, 1892. Thus the stages throughout the entire history of mail routes in Brimfield stopped at the corner store



ARRIVAL OF THE COACH AT THE CORNER STORE

through a longer duration of time than at any other place. On the appointment of Albert W. Pierson as postmaster in 1892 the post-office was moved to an extension of his house, where it remained until January, 1907, when the present postmaster, Fred T. Parker, appointed in November, 1906, moved it into the quarters it now occupies in an addition to his residence. Here it was on September 14, 1907, that the last stage of the long succession stopped for the last time with its important burden, and in strange contrast to the gay entry of grand coach with prancing horses and sounding bugle, took its departure unmourned and unnoted, to complete the journey whose termination should divest forever both conveyance and route of the official importance and sacred dignity conferred by the great and glorious government of the United States.

The small quantity of mail carried by the coaches of the earlier periods was in marked contrast to the grandeur of the equipage; but the importance of letters, forming as they did the sole and infrequent connection between friends enduring the separation not only of distance, but of difficulty of travel and communication, cannot be realized. The contents of the mail bags differed from those of the present time in appearance as well as quantity. Letters were written on letter-size sheets of paper, which were folded and sealed and sent without envelopes or stamps, the amount of postage being marked in the right-hand upper corner instead. Rates of postage were according to distance for single letters, the rates being doubled for double letters. They were an expensive joy at the lowest, and were not to be lightly dispatched.

The charges, however, were more often paid by those receiving the letters than by the senders, and people were allowed to keep an open account with the postmaster. An account at the Brimfield post-office shows a bill of a year's standing. A record in 1835 at that office shows charges of six cents, 10 cents,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cents,  $18\frac{3}{4}$  cents and 25 cents for one letter. For two letters there were charges of 16 cents, 20 cents,  $28\frac{3}{4}$  cents and  $47\frac{1}{2}$  cents. Both weight and distance appear to have been calculated in the charges. One cent was charged for a paper, five cents for three papers. In one account a well-known citizen is charged  $18\frac{3}{4}$  cents for "1 letter for Lydia," who is recorded as the fortunate recipient of a number of letters quite regularly at the same cost. As this Lydia became the wife of John W. Foster, one of the earliest American geologists, it may be surmised that the letters were from her betrothed. It should be mentioned that these post-office accounts are kept on the closing pages of the book containing the articles of agreement of the Hartford and Worcester Citizens' line of stage-coaches, in accordance with the custom of utilizing any paper that could be found. It would be interesting to know why this book happened to be at the Brimfield post-office. The post-office at East Brimfield was established in 1858, and Major Erastus Lumbard was the first postmaster. For a short time there was a post-office at Foskett's mill for that neighborhood and Parksville. Afterward the contents of a small Palmer mail sack were distributed from the mill.

## History of the Southbridge and Palmer Line

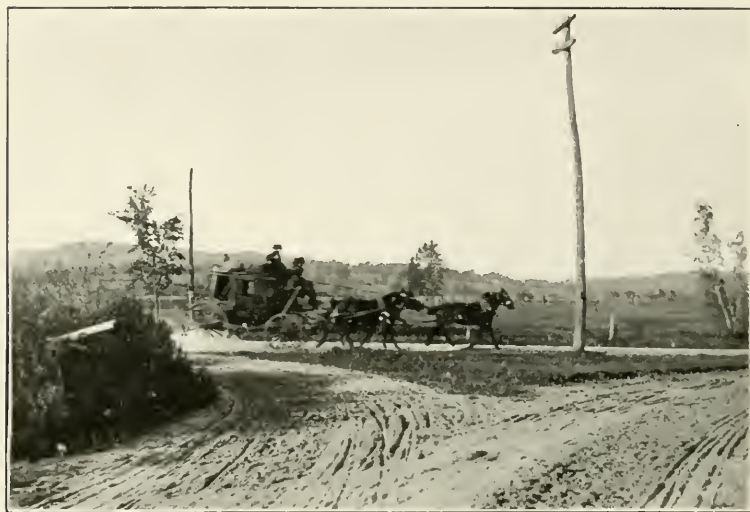
Whatever may have been the wonders and achievements of stage coaching in the earlier periods, no line ever held a more important relation to the local community or possessed finer associations than the one whose recent termination closed the age so remarkably prolonged in its section.

This line was opened about the time of the completion of the New London Northern railroad to Palmer. Capt. Alonzo N. Dewey of Palmer was the proprietor who gave the line its early distinction, although he may not have been the first owner; while he also made it a mail route. Captain Dewey was a man of much business ability, directed especially in the interests of the traveling public. He had previously opened two hotels in Palmer, and started a stage line from Stafford to Palmer, which

he extended to Ware and Barre in 1850, about the time he owned the line from Palmer to Southbridge. The last-mentioned route was from the railroad station and post-office at Palmer "Depot" through Brimfield and Sturbridge to the post-office at Southbridge. Until the opening of the New England railroad to Southbridge in 1866 the mail was carried from that town to Webster and Charlton by stages. Captain Dewey put on to the Southbridge line a large splendid coach, one of the best ever used on the stage routes, drawn by four fine horses, all making a grand appearance. This was a thorough-brace Concord coach of the style built first in 1827 in Concord, N. H., and which has been called "the only perfect passenger vehicle for traveling that has ever been built." The same style of stage continued to be used until the latter part of the history of the line when constantly decreasing patronage, owing to changed conditions of business and travel, caused the large coach with its four, and occasionally six, horses to be reduced to a small one drawn by only two horses, and finally to give way to a humble, plain covered wagon without pretension to beauty, nor always to comfort. The importance of the stage of the original schedule was also reduced by the addition of an extra mail wagon daily over the same route. The length of the Palmer and Southbridge route was 18 miles, which Brimfield divided into two stages, the horses being always changed there when the large coaches were in use.

Among the drivers of the early period were Andrew L. Holt, a Mr. Pebbles, Valentine Bond, Addison Bradley, Reuben Underwood, Chauncey Olds, Frank Angel, Austin Shepard, "Jake" Barton, Perlin Turner, Salem Welds, Andrew Hooker, Dwight Johnson, "Jake" Haywood, James Madigan and Samuel Gould. Andrew Holt, who is now living in Worcester and is 86 years old, drove Captain Dewey's stage on its first trip. Mr. Pebbles was the first regular driver, but Mr. Holt, who often substituted on various lines because of his experience and skill in the art of stage-driving, was employed to instruct Pebbles for two weeks. Mr. Holt describes Captain Dewey's grand turnout on its first appearance as drawn by four beautiful dapple-gray horses with long wavy manes and tails, and the coach as large enough to hold twelve passengers inside. Mr. Holt's reminiscences of stage-coach days from the time that he commenced driving between Springfield and Palmer in his fourteenth year would form an interesting chapter.





THE AFTERNOON COACH ON THE PLAIN

"Val" Bond, who used to polish Dana Scripture's horses, is said to have introduced the bugle on this line. Mr. Bradley became a high sheriff. Mr. Underwood had athletic powers, and the story is told that he could stand on the ground and jump over a horse with one spring. Frank Angel is now living in Wilbraham and is a veteran of the Civil war. Salem Welds was an owner and skilful driver. "Perl" Turner is one of the early drivers who are best remembered. Afterwards came Walter Claflin, D. E. Butterworth, Edwin Streeter, Otis Coburn and Needham Moulton. "Sam" Gould was the owner and driver with whom the Southbridge and Palmer stage is especially identified in the memories of many people. Edwin Streeter was the driver who escaped with a broken leg when a wheel came off the stage as it was going down a hill on the Sturbridge road,—an accident which former school pupils who were on the stage recall with wonder that their lives were spared. Owners besides those mentioned were, Silas C. Herring, Walter Claflin, J. Wells Draper, Ames Munroe and D. Everett Butterworth; and owners and drivers later on were, Abraham Prosper, James George and Sons and W. C. Kenyon and Sons, the last-named being the owners when the line was discontinued. James George and his sons, Walter, George and Herbert, as drivers covered a period of about twelve years. The



THE HOTEL OF STAGE-COACH DAYS



WAITING FOR THE PASSENGERS

Kenyon brothers and Harry Thompson were youthful drivers during the last of the stage's career. To the last name belongs the distinction of closing the list which it is impossible to give in its completeness.

Although the conveyance, as well as the line, received its name from the terminal points of the route, its importance belonged especially to Brimfield life, and in the associations of people it chiefly figures as the "Brimfield stage," inseparably connected with memories of that town. It was interwoven with the life of a people peculiarly dependent upon it, and with the interests of friends outside the town. Cherished sentiments are revived by recollections of the Brimfield stage. Perhaps the most characteristic of these associations calls up the imposing figure of the genial host and type of the old-time landlord, Uncle Amos Munroe, standing on the porch of the Brimfield hotel to greet arriving guests or wave a farewell to those departing. And joined with this is the memory of the motherly hostess, Mrs. Munroe, offering in summer to the thirsty traveler a cup of cold water, or in winter leading the way to her cozy sitting-room.

The arrival of the afternoon stage at the post-office where old and young had congregated in eager anticipation of its coming, and the distribution of the mail it bore, made that place the exciting social center of the otherwise sleepy village.

## **Boys and Girls of the Hitchcock School**

The history of the Southbridge and Palmer stage is closely related to that of the Hitchcock Free Academy, since it furnished daily transportation for pupils from the time of the establishment of the school in 1855. At one time about 20 pupils from Southbridge, Sturbridge, Fiskdale and East Brimfield well-nigh took possession of the coach, which, arriving at nine o'clock, would unload before the school yard a subdued company of boys and girls weighed down with books and dinner baskets, and returning at four o'clock, received a hilarious crowd, plunging inside and clambering to the top. Should the school's program be disturbed by changes in the stage's schedule or irregularity in its time, all deference was paid to the situation; for the arrival and departure of the "stage scholars" received the respect due to recognized importance. Also in the village these occurrences were two notable events of the day. It was from the



THE ORIGINAL BUILDING OF THE HITCHCOCK FREE GRAMMAR SCHOOL



THE PRESENT HITCHCOCK FREE ACADEMY

loaded coach at the beginning of the year that teachers and pupils obtained their first impressions of the place which was to be the scene of their labors and activities, and it was the coach that bore them impressively away, waving their farewells to those who turned with reluctant steps to the lonely pursuits of a deserted village.

## **The Simple Worshiper of the Stage Coach**

No story of the Brimfield stage would be complete without mention of the Brimfield character to whom, throughout his life, the stage represented the glory of the world and the joy of existence. In his boyhood days the horses were changed at his father's barn, and the sense of proprietary interest then begun, humored by good-natured drivers, strengthened as he grew to the age of manhood but still retained the mind of a child. The driver was ever his liege lord, and the privilege of helping with horses, or trunks, was no less an honor than to belong to a royal retinue. Indeed, there was summed up in this regard the importance, the romance and the grandeur with which the stage coach in all its history has been invested,—a tribute both to the quality of the object so esteemed and to the capacity for admiration and honor common to mankind in all stages of development. And as the years went by and his figure became a picturesque landmark, softened by the pathetic grace of age, these who knew his story thought with reverence of that loyalty and devotion which, though less ardently manifested with the decline of life and the decay of the stage's grandeur, never to the end suffered surrender or betrayal.

As the Palmer and Southbridge mail route had branches from the Brimfield post-office to those of Wales and Holland, the scene of the arrival of the stage in Brimfield included the mail wagons from those places patiently awaiting the mail bags, and taking in the passengers who had descended from the coach to journey still farther over country roads whatever the weather or traveling. These mail wagons of various styles through the years also conveyed many pupils to and from the Academy. Among the drivers of the Wales mail team, an original character, Darwin or "Dar" Shaw, is especially remembered for his long and faithful service. There are many old scholars who rode with him who recall his kindness as well as his white horse, and are sorrier now than they were then for the lameness which in his later life imprisoned him in the wagon as he waited for his lively passengers.



## Transverse Lines

While the direction of the longest maintained and most important stage routes through Brimfield was east and west—the Springfield and Providence and the Palmer and Southbridge lines together lasting about 80 years—there were a number of transverse lines through the town at different times. In early days these routes were through Brimfield to Brookfield, or through that town to Worcester, and to Warren. The last of these transverse lines was established between Wales and West Warren by Samuel Gould in April, 1874, and continued till March, 1877. The drivers were Mr. Kendall, Charles Craft, Needham Moulton and Dwight Barnes. Charles Thompson bought the line of Mr. Gould and changed the route so that it connected with the Boston and Albany railroad at Palmer instead of West Warren. Succeeding owners were William Preston, John W. Draper, D. Everett Butterworth, John Lumbard, Frank Traverse, Mr. Dalrymple, Jason Palmer and George Dimmick. It is with Mr. Dimmick, who was owner and driver from 1887 to 1900, that the Wales stage, as it was called, is principally identified. Leaving Brimfield at the early hour of 6.30 and returning in the evening, it gave the opportunity of spending an entire day at the county seat, or even of a flight to Boston with the possibility of returning to the hill eyrie at a seasonable time before the ringing of the curfew.

## Scenes of the Southbridge and Palmer Route

Throughout its course of 18 miles the route that was followed by the Southbridge and Palmer stage is one of unusual interest, lying through a succession of scenes that form a remarkably complete representation of New England landscape and life. Nature in her diversity shows all varieties of scenery. Two beautiful rivers, both perpetuating Indian names, the Quinabaug and Quaboag, are distinctive features of the landscape in the western and eastern parts of the route. Broad green meadows, fertile fields and stretches of plain combine with wooded hills, rugged ledges and the forest solitudes. There are winding brooks in the meadows and rushing streamlets through wild ravines. There are broad and inspiring views of near and distant hills. Here are the homesteads of well-tilled farms and close at hand Nature in her untamed and lonely aspect reigns.



THE WALES STAGE WHEN OWNED BY GEORGE DIMMICK



FOSKETT'S MILLS

On its morning trip the stage, having passed through the long street of the busy mill village of Fiskdale, left behind the whirr of machinery to pursue its course along the peaceful meadows of the Quinabaug; then it turned aside to the post-office of East Brimfield, going past the little brown church and down the road between the two rows of neat dwellings, where as in olden times a single industry on the river's bank affords occupation for a homogeneous neighborhood. After the stage had safely made the descent of "Breakneck" hill, passed through Brimfield village and across the "plain," and rolled swiftly down the Brimfield mountain or "long hill," it drew up to "Foskett's mill" to receive a tiny mail-bag and refresh the horses with drafts of clear spring water from the hills. Though passengers could sometimes hear the noise of the mill-stone turned by the water of historic Elbow brook, grinding the farmers' corn, the old-time grist-mill had caught the spirit of new enterprise through the western gap and become a thrifty grain mart to supply the needs of the section from distant and richer fields. The picturesquely-set cluster of Foskett's mill and near-by houses marked the transition from the wild, mountainous region to the level stretches of the Quaboag valley with its fertile farms, varied activities and connection with the world. To the occupants of the old-fashioned stage-coach a new region opened ahead—even the borders of the wide world; for, in the near distance, poured the smoke of the locomotive, and the swiftly rushing train, an unwonted sight and thrilling to behold, swept into clear view. Behind and beyond the mountain were the quiet life and the calm and thoughtful pursuits continued from the past; before and stretching far onward were the scenes and the interests of the modern world and the new age.

## Characteristics of Towns and Villages

The towns and villages of the route are types characteristic of New England. Palmer "Depot," when Captain Dewey's first stage-coach started out, had just come into existence with its score or more of houses set in the green fields. It was the creation of a junction of railroads, and the stages of later years passed along the main street of a bustling business center, the seat of trade for the country-side and near-by mill villages. Southbridge, at the other end of the route, illustrates the marvelous growth and transformation that so many towns have experienced through the development of power manufacturing. In the half-century of their arrival



THE BRIMFIELD CHURCH



THE GEN. EATON MANSION





FROM THE LONG HILL TO THE QUABOAG VALLEY

and departure the stages witnessed the development of prosperity through a great variety of important industries and also saw a town of less than 3000 inhabitants of pure New England stock quadrupled by the addition of people of other nationalities. Sturbridge and Brimfield represent the preservation of the perfect type of the old New England town, holding unchanged the spirit of the past with its dignity and repose. Their scenes to which the stage-coach was fittingly related, have remained essentially unchanged. Year in and year out the stages passed along the beautiful village green and under the overarching trees, by the well-kept and quaint dwellings, with now and then a stately mansion, of each of these sister towns, the white spire of the church of the fathers rightly set on a hill overlooking the way and dominating the scene. In its latter days the stage witnessed a new manifestation of the continuing welfare and inward progress of these old towns, in spite of the arrest of their outward growth, in their public libraries, beautiful, characteristic, impressive, uniting the past with the present as memorials, and perpetuating and enlarging the interests and ideals of former generations.

### The Long Hill Road

The passage of the Long Hill road, which winding for a mile climbed the ascent of the rough mountainside that lifted from the Quaboag valley to the level of the Brimfield plateau, was the distinctive feature of the route between Palmer and Brimfield. A long mile indeed seemed the ascent. The descent was speedy and sometimes exciting; but in spite





THE APPROACH TO THE VILLAGE

of the absence of brakes in the earlier years, and the fact that drivers were in the habit of taking loads of 20 passengers at full speed down the hill, no accident ever occurred. The only approach to catastrophe was when the load was light and a lone passenger suffered violent contacts of Sunday bonnet or beaver hat with the roof of the stage, as the vehicle bounded over the "thank-you-ma'ams" or water bars with which the road was generously provided. The driver, while duly conscious of his responsibility for life and limb, scorned to consider the danger of injured headgear or wounded pride, even if he did not sometimes take a little wicked pleasure in exercising his command of the situation. There was real peril in winter, however, on a section of the first "old road" between the "plastered house" and the school-house, when it was icy. Then the heavily-loaded coach descending the ice-coated road was in danger of sliding off into the ravine below. At such times a pair of oxen was kept in readiness to be hitched by the yoke to the hind axle of the coach while the owner of the oxen by a dexterous wielding of his whip would skilfully manage this curious combination of brake and rudder until the descent was safely accomplished. A morning ride in summer down the Long Hill gave to one who had gained the coveted top seat a glorious exaltation of spirit. The scenery was at first picturesque and then grand. At the



THE VILLAGE SQUARE

beginning of the descent the traveler looked down on either hand into the deep ravines with their rushing brooklets bordered by the tangle of the wildwood. Farther on there opened to view a noble panorama of lofty hills raising their forest-clad cones against the western sky. The exhilaration of motion through the morning air, the sense of sharing in Nature's renewal, and of companionship with her grandeur gave a new infusion of the joy of living, while the world seemed freshly created.

It was a different matter to toil up the sandy road of the same Long Hill after panting horses on a hot August afternoon or to climb up the long stretches on foot after dismounting to lighten the load. But there were compensations in the reward of wayside beauties and the unaccustomed nearness to Nature in her solitude and wildness. When roads were poor and the tediousness of the long hill seemed to stretch over the entire route, there were the tales of friendly drivers to beguile the weariness of the journey.

No entrance of trolley car can ever compare in impressiveness with the arrival of the afternoon coach in Brimfield. In the late afternoon of a summer's day children watched with fascinated gaze the golden column of sunlit dust which instead of the bugle of old heralded the approach of the stage-coach far off on the western plain, until the coach itself came in sight like a chariot in a cloud of glory. When the coach turned from its course with what breathless anticipation was it awaited till it should draw

up to the gate with the eagerly-looked-for visitor who had thus compassed these last and longest miles of journeying out of devotion to the old home or the claims of friendship. No matter how far the newer and swifter means of travel had brought the loved ones, it was the stage-coach that was honored and blessed for bringing them at last to the heart's own welcome.

As the stage-coach came into sight over the hills and from out the windings of the country roads, it appeared to the beholder something far different from a device for locomotion propelled by mechanical forces. Something more than a means of conveyance was approaching; for a stage-coach was instinct with associations and it even seemed invested with life and personality. And to the traveler, a stage-coach ride was not merely a convenient way of being transported over distances. It was a true progress of which he formed a part, because the progress was by living forces and animated by will and intelligence. Horses, coach, driver and passengers became one in a common impulse, together prevailing in exultant freedom over the stationary, inanimate world and dull stay-at-home existence.

But alas! the day came when the stage-coach was no longer esteemed by the traveler as a fit expression of his increasing power and dominion. Its glory waned and it fell from its high estate. Then when it became a humble and homely vehicle with horses impressed into plodding service instead of elected to a proud career, the estrangement became complete. With the vanishing of united purpose and pride the journey became a tedious passage instead of a triumphant progress. In common with all history, stage-coaching had seen its golden age. For the times had changed. The era of new achievements, of speed and unrest in doing and living and traveling had developed. Swifter means of transit superseded the picturesque stage-coach, and the route over the Brimfield hills was no longer the thoroughfare of yore. Travelers followed the easier lines of passage and turned aside less and less to the hill-encircled village with its refined life and quiet pursuits. The departure of material prosperity and diminishing population caused the old town to be no longer the attracting center of the section. Because of the increasing opportunities everywhere for education, the time-honored academy was no longer sought by those far from the boundaries of Brimfield. Thus it came to pass that the latter-day means of travel in the lowly guise which



WHERE MARQUIS CONVERSE KEPT THE POST-OFFICE

seemed almost to rob the landscape of its glories was all that conditions of industry and of living,—forever making their inevitable adjustments, would permit to exist. The Brimfield stage was not of the present age and world, and yet it continued to make its passage daily with its few unwilling occupants, continuing in the service of the government, while the favor of travel gradually declined.

The passing of an institution, a custom or a career, however advantageously it may be displaced, should not be slightly regarded. The representative of more than a half-century of two-fold service so interwoven with the life of a people, witnessing such developments and sharing such changes, now passed forever from sight and soon to pass from mind, should not be thought of merely as a pathetic survival of the unfit, but considered with reverence as faithfully fulfilling to the end a sacred commission from the past.





THE PASSING OF THE OLD-TIME COACH





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